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MOST SECRET.COPY NO. 18W.M.(40) 114th CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 1.Confidential Annex.

(7th May, 1940.)

THE NETHERLANDS.

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Allied naval, military and air action in the event of a German attack on the Netherland Islands.

(Previous Reference:  
W.M.(40) 109th Conclusions, Minute 9.)

The War Cabinet had before them a Report by

the Chiefs of Staff Committee (W.P.(40) 143).

THE PRIME MINISTER said that there was one observation which he would like to make at the outset of the discussion. The Report stated that the occupation of the Netherland Islands would be merely a first step in a German occupation of Holland. He felt, however, that it would be unsafe to rule out altogether the possibility that an attack on the Islands might not be followed by the movement of German troops for an appreciable period. If the Allied troops moved forward into Belgium as soon as the Germans attacked the Islands, then presumably the German Army would also move. The responsibility for ordering the Allied advance, however, lay with the French; they might hesitate to give that order if the German move was limited to the occupation of the Islands. Presumably, the right time to attack the German marshalling yards was at the earliest possible moment after the German Army had started to move.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR thought that it was inconceivable that the Germans would confine their action to taking the Islands. He felt certain that land invasion would inevitably follow, and that, therefore, we should strike at Germany at once and not wait until their troops were on the move.

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF agreed. It would be of little value to the Germans merely to occupy the Islands, where they would be subject to a very heavy scale of air attack.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that his point would be met by a statement in the Report to the effect that air attack on the marshalling yards would not be completely automatic, i.e. they would not, of course, be attacked if they did not actually contain German troops.

The War Cabinet agreed that the Report should be amended in the sense suggested by the Prime Minister.

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF then invited attention to the main points in the Report. The following additional points emerged from the ensuing discussion: -

- (1) The difficulties of using the bomber force when there was no moon, were emphasised in paragraph 8. While it might be difficult to identify such targets as oil refineries, marshalling yards would have to be lit up if they were in use, while coking plants and power plants were self-illuminating.

attack on the  
r.

(2) It was an essential part of our plans to attack the marshalling yards in the Ruhr in the event of a German invasion of Holland or Belgium. Unless targets in the Ruhr were to be attacked, the heavy bomber force could not be used to counter the attack on Holland or Belgium. Attack on the marshalling yards would not, however, employ the whole of our heavy bomber resources, and it was therefore intended, if the German attack took place at a time when there was no moon, to devote a part of the heavy bomber force to attack self-illuminating targets, such as coking and power plants.

Mine-laying  
in German  
rivers.

(3) The first section of paragraph 9 should be amended to make it clear that the laying of mines in the mouths of the Elbe, Jade, Weser and Ems had been done by Fleet Air Arm and R.A.F. aircraft and not by submarines.

Magnetic  
mines.

(4) Paragraph 9, second sentence. The present output of magnetic mines was 200 per month and would rise to 500 per month by 1st July. This output was sufficient to allow both for operation Paul and for mining the Western German ports.

Denial of  
Dutch  
aerodromes  
to the  
Germans.

(5) No sure information had yet been received of the action taken by the Dutch to prepare demolitions at their aerodromes. The British Ambassador at The Hague had been asked to report on the matter.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M.(40) 113th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 9.)

Denial of Dutch and Belgian resources.

Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (39) 61st  
Conclusions,  
Minute 5.)

- (6) THE MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO informed the War Cabinet that a most satisfactory meeting had recently been held in Paris between British, French and Belgian representatives in connection with the denial of resources to Germany in the event of invasion. So far as Belgium was concerned, satisfactory action had already been taken to reduce stocks of raw materials and oil, or to transfer them to the vicinity of the French frontier. Similar precautions had been taken over the Belgian gold reserves. The position as regards Holland, although not so satisfactory as in the case of Belgium, had shown some improvement.

Strengthening of Naval Forces on the East Coast.

- (7) Submarine patrols off the Dutch Islands had been strengthened. Two cruisers, hitherto based on Rosyth, were being sent further South. No additional destroyers, however, were yet available for the defence of the East coast.

Mining of the Danube.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 91st  
Conclusions,  
Minute 4.)

- (8) THE MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO said that the laying of fluvial mines in the Danube would be an important corollary to the Royal Marine Operation and the laying of mines in the Rhine by aircraft. The mines would be laid in the German portion of the Danube and would become innocuous before they reached neutral waters.

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF said that once the battle had started on the Western Front, it would absorb the whole of our bomber effort and it would be impossible to spare bombers for mining operations either on the Rhine or the Danube.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR said that his view of the considerations raised in the report was founded on the conviction that a German attack on Holland would be a decisive move aimed at the very existence of this country. Our best moment to hit back would be as soon as the German attack was made, and before they had time to establish themselves. The longer we delayed, the more difficult action would be. If the Germans attacked the Dutch Islands, we should at once attack the enemy's transports on the Island aerodromes, and should intensify the laying of mines. Should we go further and take action which would open up unrestricted air war?

In the light of Supreme War Council decisions, we were free to do so, but there were two other questions:-

- (i) Had we the necessary air strength?
- (ii) Was it strategically wise to do so at the present moment?

In many ways there would be disadvantages in using the whole of our bomber strength at the present moment. Our total first line long-range bomber strength was 450. (This figure included about 100 Blenheims, which would not be used for an attack on the Ruhr.) Of this figure of 450 we had lost 75 during the period of the operations in Norway. As against that loss, 107 long-range bombers had been delivered from aircraft storage units and contractors to operational units during the same period. Many of the machines in reserve, however, were short of necessary



equipment and modifications, and though every effort was being made to improve the position, the Air Ministry considered that at the present time they could not rely on more than 240 heavy bombers, of which only half would be actually serviceable on any given day. Our available striking force on any given day was, therefore, 120 heavy bombers. (This figure did not include Blenheims.)

Was this a sufficient force for carrying out our plan of attack on the Ruhr?

It was calculated that with the force available we could drop 28 tons of bombs a night on oil refineries, marshalling yards and vital plants. At this rate we should theoretically be able to destroy the objectives in 11 - 18 days.

Our casualties in Scandinavia had been 6% per raid. In the Ruhr the casualties were assessed at 10% per raid, i.e. 30 bombers a week, although operations would only be carried out at night.

Leaving out of account the effect of enemy attack on our aircraft industry, our production in the same period should be 21 - 34 heavy bombers a week.

It was calculated that we should be able to carry on operations at the intensity indicated for six weeks, after which the scale of effort would drop by about 50 per cent.

He (the Secretary of State for Air) would, naturally, prefer that we should not start these operations until we were in a more satisfactory position as regards equipment and, particularly, as regards the A.A. gun position. We had only 40 per cent. of our requirements in heavy A.A. guns and but 9 per cent. of our light A.A. gun requirements. He was convinced, however, that the risks of putting off the attack were too great. Moreover, if we did not use our heavy bombers to attack the Ruhr, they would not be used at all. It would be most wasteful to use our heavy bombers by day for the land battle, for which we had plenty of short-range bombers. If we confined attack to the marshalling yards, we would bring on total war just as surely as if we attacked the oil refineries. The plan proposed did not anticipate the use or exhaustion of our whole heavy bomber force on a single objective..

In reply to a question, the CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF estimated that as compared with our figure of 450 heavy bombers, the German figure of first-line heavy bomber strength was about 1,900. The German manufacturing and other resources were greater than ours, and consequently they would be able to replace losses more quickly than we could.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that if we were to attack the German marshalling yards only, this would not necessarily provoke retaliation by the

German Air Force on industry in this country. On the other hand, if, in addition to marshalling yards, we were to attack German oil refineries and coke ovens, such attack would, in his opinion, inevitably result in retaliation.

The Chiefs of Staff proposed that air action should be taken against objectives in Germany the moment the Germans moved into Holland. A very great effort on the part of the Allies would be needed to meet that move. He thought that it was a matter for consideration whether air attack on German oil refineries and coke ovens would assist that effort, or would be worth while, taking into account the very heavy scale of air attack by the German Air Force to which it would expose this country.

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF considered that it would be unsound to assume that we should be saved from retaliation, were we to confine our attacks to marshalling yards alone.

In reply to various questions bearing on the indiscriminate nature of night bombing, he explained that heavy bombers on both sides would operate at night. Neither we nor the Germans had as yet any satisfactory means of interception in the dark. During 250 out of the 365 nights in the year searchlights were ineffective in this country, though the proportion of cloudless nights was greater in summer than in winter. The illumination of



marshalling yards and the glow of coke ovens would make these targets visible at night. Oil refineries would not, however, show up.

If we were right in assuming that we could inflict serious damage on targets in the Ruhr, Germany could also inflict damage here. We should undoubtedly suffer many casualties and damage to such targets as our big ports and industrial areas. On the other hand there was no target in this country comparable to the German marshalling yards.

In reply to a question as to his personal view, THE VICE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF said that once the land battle had been joined in the west it would be wrong to divert any of our resources from it. Heavy bombers were not, of course, suitable for actual co-operation with the land forces in the immediate battle zone, but he thought that they should be used to the fullest possible extent wherever they might be capable of contributing to the success of the land battle. Since it was accepted that they could do this by attacking marshalling yards, he advocated that the full force of our heavy air attack should be diverted to them and not to other targets.

Attack on other targets would open up unrestricted warfare. He was ready to believe that the higher morale of the people of this country would enable them to withstand air attack

better than the people of Germany. He also understood that in certain spheres of civil defence, such as fire fighting, we were better equipped than the Germans. It was open to argument, therefore, whether unrestricted air warfare might not be to our advantage. He fully believed, however, that it would be a mistake, on military grounds, to attempt to employ our Air Force on these two separate and distinct roles at one and the same time.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that although he fully appreciated the force of the arguments of the Secretary of State for Air, he considered that it would be very dangerous and undesirable to take the initiative in opening unrestricted air warfare at a time when we possessed only a quarter of the striking power of the German Air Force. Even a limited initiative on our part might result in a wholesale indiscriminate bombing of this country. If this happened, we should not be able to appeal to the United States, who would be able to retort that it was we who had taken the first step. He suggested that we should press on with the production of small incendiary capsules for the destruction of German harvests and forests. We should use the existence of this weapon as a threat to induce our enemies to confine air bombing to the zone of operations.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff both felt objection to attacking targets such as oil refineries and coke ovens, but on somewhat different grounds. The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff's objection was based on the fact that such an attack would constitute a dispersal of effort. There was also the further point that, although the difference between bombing a marshalling yard and an oil refinery might be a fine one, neutral, and particularly American, opinion might recognise the former, but not the latter, as a legitimate military objective.

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL said that he had always felt that the Germans had been nervous about air attacks on their civil population. He doubted therefore whether, despite the marked numerical superiority of their air force, they would take the initiative in carrying out an air attack on this country which would provoke retaliation on Germany and consequently put the morale of the German people to the test.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR reiterated his view that if we failed to take immediate advantage of a German invasion of Holland to launch our air attack on Germany, an opportunity so favourable to us might never recur. We had reason to believe that our navigation by night was superior to that of the

Germans; and it was to be remembered that 80 per cent of the German armament industry was concentrated in the Ruhr and therefore constituted a target which had no counterpart in this country. An air attack of the kind which was contemplated would, moreover, be carrying the war into Germany for the first time.

THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF made it clear that it was not the desire of the Air Staff to open up the "air war". Their reason for advocating air attack on Germany in the contingency contemplated was that in their view the invasion of Holland would be merely a preliminary to a German "air war" on this country; and consequently that it would be preferable that we should lose no time in seizing what, from our point of view, would be the most favourable moment to open the air war.

THE MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO reminded the War Cabinet of the reply which had been made by His Majesty's Government to the appeal against unrestricted air warfare which had been made by President Roosevelt on the outbreak of war. In this we had declared that we would scrupulously observe the rules until they had been broken by the enemy. He thought that it would be desirable that the Chiefs of Staff should be satisfied that the Germans had, in fact, broken the rules to an extent which would justify an attack by ourselves on German oil refineries and coke ovens. As an argument in favour of delay, he mentioned that developments in the application of R.D.F. held out promises of giving our Fighters the power to intercept bombers in the dark.

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR said that these hopes were as yet not very firm. He would himself prefer to postpone an attack on military objectives in Germany, but for his conviction that to do so in the event of a German invasion of Holland would be to deny us our only means of countering such a German move.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY considered that a better counter to this move would be found in the land battle which would be joined by the French and British Armies.

THE VICE-CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF suggested that the Germans, while invading Holland, might be content to move up to the Albert Canal without advancing further into Belgium. In this event even if the British and French Armies moved up beyond the Namur-Antwerp Line the land battle might not be joined.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that it was clear that the War Cabinet felt considerable doubt about the proposals contained in the Report by the Chiefs of Staff in regard to the initiation of air action against military objectives in Germany. He suggested that the Chiefs of Staff should re-examine the question in the light of the discussion which had taken place. He asked that the First Lord of the Admiralty, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, should be responsible for ascertaining what action the French Army would take in the event of a German attack on the Netherland Islands, as opposed to a German invasion of Holland.

The War Cabinet:-

- (1) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to give further consideration, in the light of the above discussion, to the precise objectives of our heavy bomber force in the event of a German invasion of Holland and/or Belgium:
- (2) Took note that the Chiefs of Staff's recommendations were based on the assumption that the occupation of the Netherland Islands would immediately be followed by the invasion of Holland itself. The Chiefs of Staff were invited to consider what our air objectives should be if this assumption was incorrect:
- (3) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to give further consideration, in the light of (1) and (2) above, to their Report on Allied action in the event of a German attack on the Netherland Islands (W.P.(40) 143), and to re-submit it to the War Cabinet.
- (4) Invited the First Lord of the Admiralty, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to make such enquiry as might appear desirable to confirm that the French High Command, in the event of a German attack on the Netherland Islands, would order the Allied Armies to advance into Belgium, in accordance with existing plans.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

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MOST SECRET.

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W.M.(40) 114th CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 4.

Confidential Annex.

(7th May, 1940.)

OPERATIONS  
IN NORWAY.

(Previous  
Reference:  
W.M. (40) 113th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 3.)

Narvik.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that a part of Admiral Lord Cork's telegram in regard to the possibility of carrying out an early attack on Narvik had been received, but that the remainder was still to come. The part already received showed that he appreciated the reasons for capturing Narvik as soon as possible and that his own opinion was that decided efforts should be made to do so. The telegram referred to the difficulties from which the German garrison must be suffering as indicating that they could not be in very good heart. It seemed clear that Lord Cork's final conclusion would be in favour of an early attack. He (the First Lord) was of opinion that, if this were Lord Cork's decision, nothing should be done to stop him from making the attempt.

THE PRIME MINISTER agreed with this view, which was generally accepted by the War Cabinet, subject to no new feature being disclosed by the further telegram awaited from Lord Cork.

The War Cabinet:-

- (1) Agreed that if Lord Cork's further telegram confirmed that he favoured an early attempt to capture Narvik and disclosed no new feature, he should be given discretion forthwith to adopt that course.
- (2) Invited the Prime Minister, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for War to consider Lord Cork's further telegram and to decide whether a reply should be sent as in (1) without further reference to the War Cabinet.